The Art of Government of Melbourne’s City Link Project
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ABSTRACT

This paper provides the first findings from a study of the art of government (AoG) of Mega Urban Transport Projects (MUTPs), being undertaken on three Australian MUTPs. Using Foucault’s conceptualisation of AoG within the broader theory of governmentality, the paper attempts to identify the amalgam of knowledge, technology and rationality within which Melbourne’s City Link freeway project came about and was implemented. The paper leverages data collected from twenty interviews and a profile of the project developed for OMEGA Project 2, an international study on MUTPs. Following an adapted version of the method proposed by Mitchell Dean the paper traces the construction of the problem and solution which City link represents, and one of the technologies used in the project, to determine the specific AoG of Melbourne’s City Link project. What becomes apparent is that the AoG of MUTP is strongly characterised by the general AoG of project, albeit with particularisations generated by the size and unique characteristics of the project, and its utilisation for transport.
Introduction

Mega urban transport projects (MUTPs), are increasingly being used in urban environments to ameliorate the problem of congestion. They are increasing in size, number and complexity across the world (Capka, 2004; Ekenger, 1987; Kumaraswamy & Morris, 2002). At the same time Flyvbjerg (2005) notes that in 9 out of 10 such projects, cost overruns of 50% are common, and 100% cost overrun is not uncommon. The estimated positive economic and development benefits of MUTPs are mostly ‘non-existent, marginal or even negative’ (Flyvbjerg, 2005 p.20). Similar results have been found by other authors (Allport, 2005; Boyce, 1990). An additional problem faced by MUTPs is that they are often poorly integrated into the transport networks they inhabit and lack public acceptance.

Public-private partnerships have been touted as the solution to the issue of cost overruns in MUTPs; the introduction of private sector expertise and competitive business practices being seen as a way to overcome public sector incompetence and overspending. A plethora of research has been undertaken with increasingly elegant solutions generated to improve the outcome of these partnerships, such as aligning the purposes of the partners (Koppenjan, 2008; Samset, 2008; Siemiatycki, 2006), and appropriate risk allocation (Arndt, 2000). Similarly elegant solutions have been proposed to address the issue of project integration and public acceptance, including various methods to include the public in consultation on the development and implementation of projects (De Bruijn & Leijten, 2008). Despite the improvements, the issues have shown significant intractability in the face of these solutions.

This paper presents initial findings from a study which applies Foucault’s theory of governmentality (see Foucault, 1991a) to MUTPs with a view to providing a new view of the intractability of the issues; why the solutions proposed do not seem to be properly implemented, and often have muted impact. It is hypothesised that MUTPs arise in a particular art of government (AoG) which provides the ontology of the agents within the project, and thus what is possible. In this sense AoG is thought of as the amalgam of knowledge, technology and rationality used in the project which acts to produce a type of Heideggerian episteme: a way of being which determines what we see and know (Braun & Castree, 1998). The proposition is that the proposed
solutions arise in a different AoG from MUTP and therefore cannot be made proper sense of by the project or those within it. How this works specifically for the case study of Melbourne’s City Link is demonstrated in the discussion section of this paper.

In order to examine the proposition that the proposed solutions to the issues MUTPs face arise in a different AoG, it is necessary to first develop a sense of what is the specific AoG of MUTP. Following that, the AoG of the proposed solution must also be investigated so that any conflicts can be identified. Intuitively, the AoG of MUTP is likely to be strongly correlated to the AoG of projects more generally. This provides the starting point for the discussion section of this paper. The specificity of the AoG of Melbourne’s City Link project is then developed through analysis of a series of interview transcripts against theoretical principles derived by Dean (1999). Results from the analysis of the technology of consultation (one of the proposed solutions mentioned above) as used in City Link are then provided as a starting point to investigate the validity of the primary proposition. The paper concludes with some tentative findings regarding the effect the difference between the AoG of MUTP and the AoG of the solution makes to the project. These findings will be further investigated as the full analysis of all three Australian case studies on which this research is based is completed. Before turning to this discussion section however, some further details of the method of the study are provided.

**Method**

This paper presents results from a case study of Melbourne’s City Link. City Link is a tolled road project 22 km long, connecting three freeways around the central business district of Melbourne (see figure 1). It opened to traffic in phases between 1999 and 2000, and was built under a concession deed granted to a consortium of Transfield/Obayashi (later Transurban City Link Ltd) to design, build, finance, operate, levy tolls and maintain it for 34 years until 14 June 2034 (Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, 2006).
The data set for this research was initially generated for the OMEGA Project 2, a study of decision making in the planning, appraisal and evaluation of 31 MUTPs in 10 countries being undertaken by the OMEGA Centre, Bartlett School of Planning, University College London. The data set includes twenty interviews, and a case study profile developed from a comprehensive review of secondary sources about the project. Ten interviews were conducted as “pre-hypothesis” interviews, the other ten interviews as “hypothesis-led” interviews.

The pre-hypothesis interviews were designed to elicit anecdotes, or story telling, about the case study, following the concept of narrative analysis as a way of understanding complex acts of knowing (Snowden, 2003). Interviewees were asked about pivotal events; moments of stagnation or breakthrough; moments of rescue or sabotage; and times of community suffering or inspiration.

The hypothesis-led interviews included a series of questions asked in all OMEGA Project 2 case studies and a series of questions designed specifically for the Australian case studies. The OMEGA questions concerned project success; appraisal and evaluation; sustainability; decision making processes; management of risk uncertainty and complexity; and context. The Australia specific questions addressed the question of the AoG of MUTPs, asking about specific points in the project where changes occurred; the nature of relationships between participants in the project; and the nature of projects themselves.
Interviewees included a broad range of stakeholders who had worked on or been involved with the project especially at the conception or design stage. They included public sector employees, politicians, private sector advisors, contractors and financiers, and community members. Interviewees were identified following a review of the structure of the project and identification of key players from both the private and public sectors, and subsequently through a snowballing process. Some key respondents were interviewed in both the pre-hypothesis and hypothesis-led interview stage. All pre-hypothesis interviews were completed before any hypothesis led interviews were conducted. Some quotations from interviews have been included in the discussion section. These quotations have not been directly attributed to interviewees to protect their anonymity.

In developing the theoretical framework used in this work three main conceptions were used. Firstly, Foucault proposed that identifying the AoG in operation at any point in time

revolves around identifying the points of transformations in discourses of government (of the self and others); the changes within and between them; their derivations, mutations and redistributions; and the relationships between them (Foucault, 1991b).

Secondly, Mitchell Dean enhanced these ideas stating that the pertinent questions to identify an AoG revolve around the notion of the technology of power. He asks: How was the activity of government calculated? Who did that calculation and what forms of knowledge did they use? What techniques and forms of knowledge were used to implement it? Who is the intended target? What are the intended outcomes? (Dean, 1999). Finally, other studies of governmentality have focussed on the relationship between problem identification and solution (Murray, 2007). Combining these three theoretical frames the data from both sets of interviews was analysed against theoretical groupings which relate to Dean’s questions as follows (Table 1).
Table 1: Relationship between Dean’s methodology and theoretical groupings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dean’s question</th>
<th>Theoretical Grouping</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How was activity calculated?</td>
<td>Rationality of problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who did the calculation?</td>
<td>Rationality of solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What forms of knowledge were used?</td>
<td>Who was there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What techniques and forms of knowledge were used to implement it?</td>
<td>Technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who (what) was the intended target?</td>
<td>Technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the intended outcomes?</td>
<td>Rationality of the problem</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rationality of the solution</td>
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A further theoretical grouping containing responses to the hypothesis-led interview question ‘what is a project, when did this become one?’ was also developed. The data under each grouping was then analysed for emerging issues and themes. The ‘Technologies’ grouping was further analysed according to technology type, and ended up including such technologies as cost benefit analysis, community consultation, transport modelling, public private partnerships, policy instruments and electronic tolling. For reasons of space only the results of the analysis of the “what is a project?” grouping, the rationalities of the problem and solution groupings, and the technology of public consultation are discussed in this paper.

Discussion

AoG of Project

As the last question of a long questionnaire, only nine responses to the questions ‘What is a project?’ and ‘When did this become one?’ were collected. Although expressed in different ways, all nine respondents agreed that projects become projects when they are, as a former government minister put it, ‘a defined task which is not incapable of delivery’. Thus although it is not necessary to have a project plan, budget, etc. (which items represent the technology of project), for a project to become a project it does require a realistic prospect of being delivered. That prospect necessarily includes a commitment by someone with sufficient capacity to deliver, that the project will proceed assuming the parameters can be worked out and met in a reasonable fashion. Projects thus include the process of planning them, but they are clearly distinguished from a whim or an idea by a commitment to develop the
abovementioned project plans and budgets and to provide the resources to deliver the project once these items are developed.

Although there was division as to the moment when City Link became a project, interviewees generally pointed to a decision point that took the project beyond its proponents hands. For example, two bureaucrats considered that moment as being the decision by Cabinet to develop legislation (which is to ask the public service to devote serious effort to the development of the project), while a ministerial advisor pointed to the moment when ‘it goes to the public, where it moves beyond being funds set in ideal circumstances, and moves to being something that’s alive in its own right’. In City Link, there was a point at which those in authority decided and that once that decision was taken the project took off and developed.

This observation about a decision point correlates with the literature on project management and mega projects, and descriptions of how projects occur (Altshuler & Luberoff, 2003; Boyce, 1990). It alludes to the notion that project exists within an AoG which is strongly sovereign or *pharaonic* (Boyce, 1990). That is, the authority which decides the project will occur, is quickly made remote from the task of making the project operable. This is not to say that they are no longer involved, but once the decision has been made their role changes. The authority’s involvement is now about deciding the parameters of the project rather than the question of whether the project should occur. The technologies of project management strongly support this rationality. For example the Prince II program, developed by the Office of Government Commerce, UK, and widely regarded as the preeminent modern project management program, first requires the development of documentation which establishes who has authority within the project to make required decisions on scope, budget and so on, then it creates the documentation on which decisions must be taken (ILX Group PLC, 2009). A plan is developed which at least in theory, bounds the activity of those working in the project. Decision making in this logic is defined by the parameters of the project. The question of power is largely avoided, the legitimacy of project actors being intertwined with the original decision which was taken. A consequence of this logic is that the original decision point must be made by an authority whose ability to do so is inviolate. The integrity of the entire project rests on that assumption.
**Problem construction and solution**

A key point that governmentality studies in other fields have uncovered is the relationship between problem design and solution design. Problems are generated so as to fit the solutions which are at hand (Murray, 2007). The generation of the problem and solution produce the rationality for the project, which constitutes how the activity of the project is calculated. The rationality given for the project is bounded by, but also bounds the rationality of the solution and subsequently the design. Once this process is complete, the solution proposed occurs as the only rational solution given the construction of the problem. So that by the time the project reaches what Miller and Lessard (2008) call ‘the ramp up phase’, the logic of the problem and the solution is embedded in the project.

The construction of the problem which City Link was designed to solve reflects both localised factors and broader discourses. The strongest line of argument, found in more than half the interviews conducted, was that there was a strong project need created by the irrationality of the road system as it was laid out. As one former minister put it ‘The problem was you see we had, without those links you’ve got these radial roads just driving traffic into the city and stopping’. This perception of the irrationality of the previous road network is clearly related to a much older dialogue which perceives of cities as circulatory systems, and concurrently congestion as bad (Heynen, Kaika, & Swyngedouw, 2006). However it was a perception which for many years had been interrupted by a different political logic.

The 1968 plans for the freeway road network in Melbourne had provided for a linked freeway network (Lay, 2003), but protests against urban freeways during the 1970s prevented its realisation. The Victorian Labor Party’s support was a key factor in the success of these protests, which were based on the negative sociological and environmental impacts of freeways. By 1992 the protests against urban freeways had been all but forgotten, and there was movement in the Labor Party towards softening their stance against urban freeways. Part of this softening came about because of the rearticulation of the problem. Congestion was recast as an environmental problem, with truck traffic negatively effecting urban amenity and safety. The reason that a bypass had not been built was recast as a physical – technical problem. As one interviewee involved in road building in Melbourne put it ‘It was this idea that you
couldn’t get around Melbourne because there was no southern way around Melbourne and the Bay (Port Phillip Bay) was too close to build one’. This rearticulation of the problem opened the door to provision of the freeway links, provided the appropriate technological solution could be found.

Another significant element in the perception of the problem which City Link was built to solve was the economic circumstances in which the State found itself. As one government bureaucrats put it, ‘here we are in Melbourne coming from a position of, you know we had that economic uncertainty, we had been labelled the “rust bucket economy”’. The project presented itself both as an opportunity to demonstrate the power and effectiveness of a new model of provision of infrastructure; the public private partnership (PPP), and to stimulate the economy (Allen Consulting Group Pty Ltd, John B Cox, & Centre of Policy Studies, 1996).

The design of the City Link project was made to fit these articulations of the problem. Physically the road does in fact link three of the freeways allowing traffic to flow around Melbourne, despite the Bay being in the way, and the project was designed as a PPP. The government’s commitment was minimised to AUD 340 million (Russell, 2000), of a total project cost of AUD 2.2 billion (Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, 2006)

Once the design of the project as a PPP was set, the process of establishing the rationality for the specific solution had to be linked to the way the problem was understood. This process brought into the project a number of new rationalities which were embedded in the design. For example, the key argument for evidence of the success of the solution, reflected in some form in thirteen out of twenty interviews conducted, can be summarised as ‘imagine Melbourne without it’. This is reflective of the rationality which built the road. A rationality which was based on the fulfilment of a demand, which since the road is used, was obviously there.

For the project to work, the technology of public private partnerships had to have developed to a point where the industry was there to make it happen. There was some evidence that this was the case, as projects had been successfully undertaken in NSW, however the size and complexity of the project was quite outside that which had been attempted previously. The design of the solution as a PPP was not simply a matter of
ensuring private capital was available. It was also the fulfilment of the government’s broader objectives to develop new industries (the successful consortium listed as Transurban on the stock exchange and is now an international company). There is some disagreement amongst those interviewed as to how ideologically driven the project was. Some suggest that it was part of a project to embed more commercial savvy into the public service, a cost conscious approach and to prove the idea of PPPs could work. The alternative view is that the PPP came about purely as a way to provide the finance and kick start the economy.

In the context of the problem being articulated as Victoria having a ‘rust bucket’ economy, this need for a kick start surely had to be fulfilled, not least if Victoria’s position as ‘the place to be’ (the Kennett government’s political slogan for the State) was to be established. The relationship between the project and the expansion and development of the economy had been articulated in Liberal party policy well before the commissioning of the project. The policy ‘Roads to Recovery’, saw the upgrade of strategic roads as contributing to trade and economic and metropolitan development through the enabling of circulation of goods, jobs and people (VicRoads, 1994a). This relationship was finally established in the cost benefit analysis undertaken by Allen Consulting Group (1996).

Given the relationship between socio-environmental degradation and trucks had been established as the reason why congestion was bad, the design of the links had to create an effective bypass of central business district, in particular for trucks passing from the east of Melbourne to the north and west. This justification for the road was enhanced by ideas of linking two of the major industrial hubs of the city, namely the port and the airport. Captured for the economic argument, this would enable ‘significantly decreased travel time’ (Allen Consulting Group Pty Ltd et al., 1996), leading to the benefit of lower prices on a wide range of goods and services with direct or indirect freight or business/service travel component. Demonstrating the capacity for policy inconsistencies almost always present in government documents, the Western Bypass Environmental Impact Statement both supports this argument for a bypass function for freight, but also notes ‘these high standard roads would provide direct access to the central administrative district for overseas and interstate visitor from the airport’ (VicRoads, 1994b p.49).
Following the State government’s concerns of land use planning and transport planning integration at the time, the new high speed arterials were seen to be the solution to inevitable growth and decentralisation of economic activity which would cause traffic congestion to spread over ever larger areas and for longer periods (VicRoads, 1994a). This was a development of the argument for the absolute need to link the roads. As one interviewee put it ‘if you build it they will come, if you don’t build it they will still come. So what do you do?’ This rationality was linked to a socio-environmental one; the idea was that building a new link would allow closures of roads currently being used as through roads by trucks. As a government advisor pointed out, this was seen to be providing social benefit to those areas where traffic was congested, and economic benefit in terms of a cost shifting of maintenance of the public road system to the private project. This rationality of closing roads and freeing the network up for local traffic was used to counter the possibility that the links would induce more traffic or ‘interfere with public transport patronage policies’ (VicRoads, 1994a).

From the above summary of the problems that City Link was designed to solve and the solution that was designed, we can develop a response to Dean’s questions: How was the activity of government calculated? What forms of knowledge were used in the calculation? This activity was calculated as the solution to a set of problems faced, for which solutions had become available, and which solutions provided rationality for the lack of a link to be a problem. The problem was defined largely in terms of a physical linking problem which created a lack of circulation, which was clearly bad. Mainly it was bad for the economy, but it also inhibited social goods like free movement, safety in local streets, amenity and environmental preservation.

The technical resolution of the problem was initially developed by VicRoads; the economic/financial dimensions followed and were resolved following the election of the Kennett government in 1992. Throughout the conception and design of the project a number of technologies or forms of knowledge were used, in the main to progress the articulation of the problem as that which City Link was the solution. Public consultation was used to anticipate the impact of the project on both the environment and the affected population; cost benefit analysis was used to provide economic justification; engineering technology was used to provide physical
solutions; PPPs, with the attendant risk analysis, and traffic modelling was used to protect the state from uncertainty and risk arising from the project and to provide funds; electronic tolling was developed to ensure that the project was resolved as free flowing traffic and did not create new levels of congestion; and a number of policy and political instruments were used to force the project through and keep it on track during implementation. These technologies fortified the AoG of City Link, through empowering the specific rationalities being developed and the pharaonic, determinative nature of the AoG itself. The next section considers how public consultation was undertaken in the project. It illuminates some of the issues that confront a technology like public consultation when operating in a MUTP like City Link, uncovering why it cannot operate as a solution to legitimacy of the project as has been suggested in the literature.

**Public Consultation in City Link**

Public consultation for City Link commenced with a formal environmental impact assessment in 1992. This formal assessment leveraged two other public consultation processes conducted in 1984-86 and 1988-89 respectively. The 1984 process had been conducted on the ‘Western’ bypass only following the release of a media statement by the Minister of Transport that a study into a new road connection between the Southern end of the Tullamarine Freeway and Footscray Rd would be conducted. The process was instigated as an early consultation process to ‘address the needs of the area together with the concerns of the community’ (VicRoads, 1989, p. 1). It was thus conceived as both a problem identification and solution development process.

The second round of consultation in 1988-89 commenced with the release in October 1988 of the ‘Western Bypass Review Report’ which articulated VicRoads proposal. This process was aimed to ‘inform the community about current proposals and identify issues of concern’ (VicRoads, 1989). The report was largely technical in approach identifying issues that residents directly impacted by the extension of the road might experience, and the impact on Moonee Ponds Creek.

The formal Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process for the City Link project in 1993-4 was seen by the government as a process in which significant issues relating
to the project were identified, or as an interviewee put it ‘which enabled a better looking – well, better direction of thought on those issues, and ultimately better solutions’. The process was definitely not established to question the accepted wisdom that the project should go ahead. The experience described by one of those interviewed who was on the consultative committee was one of being sidelined, of the key administrators being unwilling to question the project, of the process in effect being used to absorb protest which could have been more effectively applied elsewhere. ‘It was a thing to, it did, you know they won handsomely in that sense. They concentrated a whole lot of the community angst about the process into a dud process which was clear to some of us at the time, but you couldn’t get people to leave it’.

All of these reports were entirely in keeping with the sovereign approach of MUTPs to consultation. They did not ask whether the project should occur, but rather asked how residents might be affected and offered avenues for constructive comment. In the early western bypass studies, residents indicated they preferred a tunnel option as this would reduce noise, pollution and visual impact. This desire was completely ignored since it was impractical and would have rendered the project unmanageable due to expense. At audit, concerns were raised about the ‘front end assessments’ (Russell, 2000) of the 1994 process. The process with the community was flawed, not least because it was conducted in parallel to, and separate from the contracting process. The bidders were present in the consultations for the EIS, and formal announcement of the project and preferred bidder were made before the final report of the EIS was produced, thus the basis of the EIS as a procedure to determine whether the project should go ahead was undermined.

From the government’s perspective this did not represent a huge issue because as several ministerial advisors pointed out at interview; the strategic decision making on projects is appropriately made at Ministerial level. This is the point at which the debate over whether the government’s money should be spent on a road or a school etc happens, and that is the role of executive government. ‘So Cabinet at the end of the day has to sit around the table and work out where they want to spend their money and included in that is not just discretionary or capital expenditure, it’s actually where do we allocate our public servants to work up the information so we can make a
decision’. This attitude clearly demonstrates two elements of concern here. Firstly that the Cabinet process can be adopted to support the AoG of MUTP, and secondly that a fully open, transparent, properly governed consultation process would undermine the AoG of MUTP, because it would question the very basis on which the project was generated, the sovereignty that created the mandate for the project.

Another set of consultation was undertaken by the project engineers following their appointment under the tendering process. This round of consultation was solely about the impact of the project as it was now designed on the ground. Fierce resistance was encountered in Richmond over the site of the tunnels, increased pollution due to substantial increases in road capacity of the South Eastern Arterial (SEA) and the location of the vent stacks. The protesters were infuriated by what they saw as the government telling lies, namely that the level of pollution on the SEA would be reduced because traffic would be moving faster despite there being more of it. The orientation of their argument necessarily moved away from a resistance to the project itself to trying to ameliorate the effects. From other protests against Kennett government projects, it was understood that protest on the grounds of prevention was useless. However some success could be had on issues like increasing the height of the ventilation stacks, ensuring they were designed to allow retrofitting of scrubbers, and that the bike track was navigable at greater than 1.2m width. Indeed the protesters were successful on these grounds, largely because of their ability to operate within the project. It was understood that this phase of consultation was not about ‘should we do this’ instead they focused their efforts on what needed to be done to the design to make it better.

The second set of consultation demonstrates the effect of binding the rationality for the problem and solution into the fabric of the project. As one interviewee pointed out ‘I think it was stupid for them to try and tell us that everything was great, because it wasn’t great. You’d be better off to say “OK it’s not great, but it has to be, and these are the benefits, and this is what we can do”’. But this type of dialogue would have been impossible. By the time the project design reached this stage, it was constituted as the only possible solution to the problem. Thus any criticism is going to shake the foundation of the entire rationality of the project, opening the door to multiple other questions.
Conclusion

Turning again then to Dean’s question’s it seems from the above analysis that City Link was calculated through a series of groups of rationalisations that came together at a particular time to produce the project or potentiality of the project. One of these was the ‘physically we need it’ group, another is the ‘we have the capability’ and another is ‘we have the will’. Who did that calculation and what forms of knowledge did they use? The initial agent was VicRoads. Their vision was enabled by private sector bidders who provided the additional technical capacity, and all important finances. The analysis above would indicate that the AoG of City Link is indeed strongly sovereign, the project only came into existence because the government decided, and like all sovereign decisions once it was made it could not be questioned. Accordingly the justification for that project that was developed and promulgated through the project was necessarily strongly techno-rational, in line with AoG of project management. Indeed a techno-rational progress is required of a sovereign decision lest a political approach dismantle the basis upon which the decision is made. Thus once decision has been decided the rest of the project stacks up on it like a house of cards. It is impossible to entertain questions of whether the project should occur, because that questions the basis of the project itself. Consultation on the project must necessarily be limited.

By justifying the decision to undertake the project as a question of need, and subsequently collapsing that analysis of need to technical and economic issues, strategic need comes to equate to demand management. In the rationality given by the project, the strategic objective is reduced to meeting the projected demand rather than being an element of vision making. The question of strategic visioning (do we want this type of city) was overridden by the fact that the road is used. Other options for dealing with the need (such as denying it and forcing people to make other choices) were rejected, or not considered. This indicates a tentative finding that the AoG of at least this MUTP was incapable of encompassing strategic planning, at least at the community level. Strategic planning thus needs to find a complementary relationship to MUTPs rather than trying to fit within them. This finding will be explored further as the research is developed.
Endnotes

1 Prior to the Labour government call for tenders in 1990 the project was conceived as two separate bypasses, the Southern bypass which would link the Westgate Freeway with the South Eastern Arterial (later the Monash Freeway) and the Western Link which would extend the Tullamarine Freeway to Footscray Rd and via that road to the Westgate Freeway.

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